

Wow – Google Scholar ‘Updates’ a big step forward in sifting through the scientific literature

by Blog Admin

August 13, 2012

Google Scholar had shown great promise as a digital tool for academics. [Jonathan Eisen](#) discovers its new ‘updates’ service has potential to open the door to a lot of new, valuable and open access research.



I logged on to Google Scholar last week and discovered something very new. This “updates” thing was not there earlier in the day. So I clicked on the link and got to this page: [Scholar Updates: Making New Connections – Google Scholar Blog](#) where James Connor from Google reports:

“Since Google Scholar launched nearly eight years ago, we’ve been helping people find the research they’re looking for. But often the spark for discovery comes from making a new connection or looking in a direction that you hadn’t yet considered and that — before your aha! moment — you wouldn’t have known to look for. Today we hope to start fostering these new connections with Scholar Updates.



We analyze your articles (as identified in your Scholar profile), scan the entire web looking for new articles relevant to your research, and then show you the most relevant articles when you visit Scholar. We determine relevance using a statistical model that incorporates what your work is about, the citation graph between articles, the fact that interests can change over time, and the authors you work with and cite. You don’t need to configure updates or enter any queries. We’ll notify you about new updates by displaying a preview on the homepage and highlighting a bell icon on search results pages: ...

To get article updates relevant to your work, all you need to do is [create a public Scholar profile](#). Article updates will automatically start to appear within a few days”.

Wow. Completely awesome if it works well. So, well, let’s see if it works well. For me the system recommends the following:

[Evolutionary Diversity of the Mitochondrial Calcium Uniporter](#) AG Bick, SE Calvo... – Science, 2012

[REGEN: Ancestral Genome Reconstruction for Bacteria](#) K Yang, LS Heath... – Genes, 2012

Both have some relevance to me. The first one is about evolution of a gene family and has a line in the abstract that clearly might have driven the automated suggestion: “*Here, we characterize the phylogenomic distribution of the uniporter’s membrane-spanning pore subunit (MCU) and regulatory partner (MICU1).*” But, well, I am not too interested in this paper. Not really my thing.

But paper number 2 seems a bit closer to my heart: [REGEN: Ancestral Genome Reconstruction for Bacteria](#). And bonus – it is freely available. And so, well, I read over it. And it is definitely related to what I do and I probably would not have seen it without this notification. Cool.

So I give Scholar Updates a 1.5 / 2 score which translates to a 7.5 out of 10. Not bad. But could be better. So I clicked on the “See all Updates” link to see what else was there. And this was a pleasant surprise. Here

is what I got (showing the first page):

50 papers in all with the “Top” selection selected at the top of the page. And some even come with a comment like:

[Cites A phylogeny-driven genomic encyclopaedia of Bacteria and Archaea](#) or
[Cites Environmental shotgun sequencing: its potential and challenges for ...](#) or
[Cites Badomics words and the power and peril of the ome-meme.](#)

You can see the full 50 results on [my blog](#). And well, I'll be damned. I kind of want to read almost all of them. So based on the top 50 I would give Scholar Updates a score of something like 47/50 or 9.4 / 10. Many have complained about the limited developments in Google Scholar over the years but this is definitely a nice development. I hope it means Google will be putting more effort into other developments.

Now – off to read some papers. And if you do not have a Google Scholar page – you should definitely think about making one now as this is how you open up this feature.

Note: This article gives the views of the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

This blog was originally published on Jonathan Eisen's personal blog, 'The Tree of Life' and can be [found here](#) with further discussion.

Related posts:

1. [Google Scholar Citations is now open to everyone. It shows great promise as a free, reliable way to track and compare academic impact over time.](#)
2. [Google Scholar Citations: a way for academics to compute citation metrics and track them over time](#)
3. [First impressions of Google Scholar Citations are good: it's easy to use and accurate](#)
4. [How to use Harzing's 'Publish or Perish' software to assess citations – a step-by-step guide](#)
5. [After the Elsevier boycott, scholarly e-presses are the way forward for academic publishing.](#)